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Notes

[Contributions in the form of notes or discussions should be sent to John A. Scott, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.]

NOTES ON THE GEOGRAPHY OF WESTERN EUROPE

In a book so frequently edited as Caesar's *Gallic War* it is somewhat surprising to find that editors have not commented upon the astonishing statements in the first chapter of the first book, to the effect that the country of the Belgians faces the northeast, that of the Celts the north, and Aquitania the northwest. As a matter of fact, if we may assume that Caesar was speaking of the ocean frontage, he should have said that Belgium faces northwest, the Celtic district partly west and partly northwest, and Aquitania directly west. The explanation is simple. Caesar was quite ignorant of the orientation of Western Europe and was giving the idea that prevailed in his time and even in the next century. Strabo (p. 199) believed that the coast of Gaul, extending from the Rhine to the Pyrenees, was all opposite the southern coast of Britain; that the Seine, the Loire, and the Garonne all flowed into the English Channel. Pomponius Mela (iii. 12) says that all the land from the Celtic promontory (Cape Finisterre) to the Scythian promontory (the imaginary point at the northeastern corner of Asia) faces north; this statement is unqualified, but it is clear that it was his belief that Gaul faced northwest, not directly north. Mela knew nothing about the sharp angle at the junction of Spain and Gaul and did not realize that a large part of Gaul faced directly west. The fact that Caesar lived in Gaul for many years would perhaps justify us in assuming that he was better informed than even the geographers, Strabo and Mela, but this first chapter is convincing evidence that his knowledge of the coast at least was exceedingly vague. Like the others, he believed that Gaul faced northwest and north, not, as is the fact, west and northwest.

Another geographical error of Caesar helps to explain certain passages in Tacitus which have given trouble to commentators. In the tenth chapter of the *Agricola* Tacitus says that Britain faces Spain on the west; and in the eleventh chapter he says that the swarthy faces of the Silures (who lived in southern Wales), their curly hair, and the fact that Spain lies opposite are proof that in ancient times the Spaniards crossed over and settled there. It has been generally assumed that Tacitus believed that Spain actually extended farther north than the southwestern corner of Britain. Caesar (*B.G.* v. 13) makes a similar mistake, but his detailed description of the island seems to make it clear that his error and probably that of Tacitus were due partly to a misconception of the orientation of Britain, and not entirely to a mistaken notion regarding the position of Spain. Describing the side of the island opposite

Gaul, Caesar says that one corner faces east, the other south; it was evidently his idea that this side extended from northeast to southwest. The second side, he says, faces Spain and the west, but it is clear that he means southwest rather than west, for he says that the third side of the triangle faces the north and there is no land opposite. Caesar evidently thought that Britain extended from the coast of Gaul toward the northwest. Therefore, while it is possible that both he and Tacitus believed that Spain extended somewhat farther to the north than is actually the case, we may understand their statement that the western side of Britain—really the southwestern side—is opposite Spain, without ascribing to them the incredible blunder of thinking that any part of Spain was actually as far north as Britain. This explanation is perhaps corroborated by a passage in the twenty-fourth chapter of the *Agricola*, where Tacitus says that Ireland lies between Britain and Spain, and is *Gallico mari opportuna*, by which he seems to mean that Ireland is conveniently located with reference to the ports of Gaul.

H. E. BURTON

HANOVER, N.H.

ENVY OF THE GODS IN THE ODYSSEY

Mr. J. A. K. Thompson in his *Studies in the Odyssey* lays especial stress on the fact that Homer has banished from his poetry, or rather that there has been expurgated from the traditional poems passing under the name of Homer, all references to the envy of the gods; cf. p. 11, "Or take another point, the absence in Homer of all apparent traces of that belief in the jealousy of the gods (*φθόνος τῶν θεῶν*) which is something like a dogma for the rest of Greek literature." By means of this argument Mr. Thompson seeks to add support to the expurgation theory already advanced by Professor Murray. This book of Mr. Thompson's may be called the joint work of both, since Professor Murray gave the impetus and "read the manuscript and made many invaluable suggestions" (Preface, p. x). It is a notable thing that this Greek belief should have no place in the poetry of Homer, or, as Professor Gildersleeve once said in regard to another theory, "important, if true."

When Menelaus narrated to Telemachus the plan he had cherished of having Odysseus leave Ithaca and settle as his neighbor near Sparta, he laments his disappointment thus:

δ 181: ἀλλὰ τὰ μέν που μέλλεν ἀγάσσεσθαι θεὸς αὐτός.

Their happiness would have been too great and so was foiled by the envy of the gods. Merry-Riddell quotes to this passage the phrase from Herodotus I. 32, τὸ θεῶν πᾶν ἐστὶ φθονερόν.

When the Phaeacians were returning from their escort of Odysseus, Poseidon turned their ship to stone and closed their harbor from further navigation. Why?

ν 173: δς ἔφασκε Ποσειδάων' ἀγάσασθαι
ἡμῖν, οὐνεκα πομπὴ ἀπ' ἡμονέες εἰμεν ἀπάντων.